

# Bahai Cuisine and Other Delicacies: Canadian-Brazilian Cultural Encounters and the Invisible Neighbour

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### **ABSTRACT**

Although activities like travel and translation are supposed to expand one's cultural horizons, it is widely accepted that one is not always able to escape the imprint of one's own society. Perhaps more critical, in the process of engaging discursively with other peoples, one runs the risk of revealing one's lack of interest in them, as reflected in a limited knowledge of their culture and history. This essay attempts to demonstrate this through an examination of the cavalier treatment of the Portuguese language in two contemporary Canadian texts about Brazil, *Brazilian Journal* by P.K. Page and *Projection: Encounters with My Runaway Mother* by Priscila Uppal, along with the idiosyncratic attitude toward Canadian history in the nineteenth-century Brazilian work *Poemas americanos I: Riel* by Mathias Carvalho. The essay's central objective is not to discourage writers from exposing themselves to other societies and chronicling their experiences. Rather, it aims to promote openness to difference through a willingness to engage with other languages and other ways of seeing and being. Indeed, the essay concludes by suggesting that writers develop strategies to remind them that they are dealing with cultures with which they are not intimately familiar, and thus inadvertently avoid injuring foreign sensibilities.

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“*This is in Brazil, but it could be anywhere.*”

--Andrew Pyper

Activities like travel and translation can arguably expand one's cultural horizons and thus create the possibility of engaging avidly with other communities. However, they can also have the reverse effect. There are times when travel and translation do not reveal a growing identification with other peoples but rather a lack of interest in them. This appears to be true not only of societies distant from each other but also of neighbouring ones, such as countries that share the same continent. In this essay, I will examine what the casual treatment of the Portuguese language in Canadian texts about Brazil, including P.K. Page's *Brazilian Journal* and Priscila Uppal's *Projection: Encounters with My Runaway Mother*, says about the Canadian attitude toward the South American country. In contrast, I will ponder what an ostensibly pro-Canadian work like Mathias Carvalho's long poem about Louis Riel inadvertently reveals about the Brazilian perception of Canada. That is, ultimately, this essay is an exploration of how not to engage communities comparatively, for sometimes in the process of writing about others one reveals one's lack of appreciation for their culture and history.

In the late 1930s, the Canadian historian A.R.M. Lower asserted that Canadians “have a certain acquaintance with the peculiar peoples who live across the very wide street of the Pacific,” particularly the Chinese. But he pointed out that “there are people who live at the end of the street whom the small [Canadian] child never sees and of whose existence he is hardly conscious. These people do not pass his house: they go out from the street by another way. They are the Latin Americans. How many Canadians have ever seen an Argentinian, still less a Chilano [sic] in the flesh? I suspect very few” (17). While for most Canadians today South America is probably no longer just “a space upon the map,” as Lower would have it (17), it is fair to suggest that it is not yet quite part of their geocultural sphere. This is the case even of the region's most populous country, Brazil, a land that has much in common with their own, although not always for positive reasons. Geographically, Canada and Brazil are two of the largest countries in the Americas—indeed, the world. They also possess two of the most powerful economies in the globe. Yet, notwithstanding their size and economic might, Canada and Brazil are often elided in inter-American discourse, which has long been dominated by the United States and Spanish-speaking America (Braz, “Outer America” 119-20). Moreover, instead of trying to counter their discursive marginality by cultivating their own special relationship, Canadian and Brazilian writers have largely ignored each other, something that is evident

in the Canadian tendency to transform the iconic Brazilian state of Bahia into Bahai and its celebrated cooking into Bahai cuisine.

The best known book on Canada and Brazil is arguably P.K. Page's *Brazilian Journal*, a text that perhaps inadvertently captures the ambiguous relationship between the two countries. Patricia Kathleen Page, who was born in England in 1916 and died in 2010, was an accomplished fiction writer, painter, and especially poet. She was dubbed “Canada's finest poet” (qtd. in Martin S12) by no less a figure than the literary scholar Constance Rooke. After growing up in Calgary and New Brunswick, Page moved to Montréal in the early 1940s and was soon embraced as “a real writer” (Page, *Hand* 17) by such notable poets as Patrick Anderson, A.M. Klein, A.J.M. Smith, and F.R. Scott, with whom she had a transformative romantic relationship (Djwa 86-92, 252-53). She published her first collection of poems in 1946, a small volume entitled *As Ten as Twenty*. But she attained success with her second one, *The Metal and the Flower*, which appeared in 1954 and was not only “well received” by critics but would go on to win “a Governor-General's Award” (Page, “Writer's Life” 13, 14); in 1944, under the pseudonym Judith Cape, she also published a novel, *The Sun and the Moon*, “to little acclaim” (13). Following her move to Ottawa to work as a scriptwriter for the National Film Board (NFB), Page had a fateful encounter with W. Arthur Irwin, whom she would marry and travel with around the world.

An established journalist and magazine editor, Irwin had gained prominence for his revitalization of *Macleans*' magazine (Chalmers 181-82; see also Djwa 127-28). This is something he achieved chiefly by hiring such up-and-coming writers as Pierre Berton, Robert Fulford, W.O. Mitchell, Peter C. Newman, and Christina McCall, a group his publisher described somewhat incongruously as “Arthur Irwin's bright young men” (Chalmers 211). However, by the time Page met him, Irwin had been recruited by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson as the commissioner of the NFB, which according to the Russian defector Igor Gouzenko was one of the Canadian federal institutions that had been infiltrated by “a Soviet spy ring” (Djwa 125). Most of the NFB's staff did not trust Irwin, whom they considered “a hatchet-man with no creative experience” (126). Among them was Page, who resented the number of friends she had lost during the ensuing purge, and decided to quit her job. When Irwin learned of her plans, he invited her “out for a meal to discuss her resignation,” which appears to have had some impact, since Page still resigned her position but agreed “to marry” him (126, 127). Before long, Irwin was persuaded by the Canadian government to join the diplomatic service and subsequently served as ambassador to such diverse countries as Australia, Brazil, and Mexico. Page, understandably, accompanied him. More importantly, she wrote a series of works about her experiences in those exotic locations,

not only *Brazilian Journal* but also its northern counterpart, *Mexican Journal*, a verse memoir entitled *Hand Luggage*, which deals extensively with her experience in Brazil, and numerous poems and essays.

*Brazilian Journal*, which was published in 1987—nearly three decades after it was written—is a significant but uneven book. To begin with, it focuses primarily on upper-class Brazil and tends to do so from a distance (see Almeida (2001) and Nenevé (2003)). Page's reticence about Brazilian social and political life probably reflects the fact that she is not only a foreign diplomat's spouse but also that she hails from a military family, being a self-styled "military brat" (Page, *Hand* 83). As she encapsulates her upbringing in *Hand Luggage*, "Apolitical us, as the army *must* be, and pro-war, as of course I was" (19-20). Page also lacks self-knowledge, especially concerning race and class. Throughout her writings, she insists that she has always been "[p]ro-underdog" and "colour-blind" (*Hand* 20, 61). Yet, in *Brazilian Journal*, she seems incapable of introducing a non-white Brazilian without describing in detail his or her phenotypical appearance, whether that particular individual is "coal-black" (7), "black-skinned" (16), or "*mulato*" (38). Tellingly, later on, Page confides that whenever she returns to either Canada or the United States, she gets the overwhelming impression that "the barbarians" have taken over (*Mexican* 82). She maintains that, in comparison to both Brazil and Mexico, there has been a universal "lowering of standards," in "service, spelling, workmanship; the disregard for and in many cases destruction of beauty; the disregard for manners" (83). Her explanation is that, in Latin American countries "the masses haven't yet control. Politically or sociologically of course I wouldn't want it otherwise for us and heaven knows my voting and my thinking had something to do with our being this way. But what a long time it will take before the masses—will they ever?—learn once again about standards" (83; see also *Hand* 84). Not surprisingly, given her misgivings about the masses, Page appears to have few qualms about firing the people who work for her, even if they happen to be afflicted with elephantiasis and she doubts that they are guilty of the infractions for which she blames them (*Brazilian* 14).

One of the unexpected consequences of her relocation to Brazil is that Page ceases to write poetry, as the country "took away my tongue." Feeling that she "had no matching vocabulary" to capture the "baroque" world she has come upon, she turns to painting (Page, "Writer's Life" (14). Thus, along with its documentation of Page's discovery of the Brazilian landscape, what makes *Brazilian Journal* most compelling is her candid account of her struggles with the Portuguese language. Page was already forty-years-old when Irwin was appointed the Canadian ambassador to Brazil, a posting that neither

one welcomed. In the great Canadian diplomatic tradition, they both "had hoped for a European embassy" (Djwa 161). Like Irwin, though, Page was also anxious about the fact that the position entailed learning another language, being well aware that she "had never properly mastered French" during all those years of living in Montréal (*Brazilian* 2). As she elaborates in *Hand Luggage*, "What baffles me now is how English we were. In a francophone city, I never spoke French" (18). Nevertheless, during the approximately two-and-a-half years she spent in Brazil, between January 1957 and August 1959, she worked feverishly to be able to operate in the country's national tongue.

Page often refers to her study of the Portuguese language, sounding quite relieved when her official classes begin "at last—three a week, first thing in the morning. A pretty, stern girl, a textbook abounding in irregular verbs, and homework" (*Brazilian* 27). She perceptively recognizes that the immersion in a new language inevitably leads to a form of infantilization, which can utterly bewilder those with whom one is trying to communicate. "How crippled one is by the lack of a language!" she observes. "Not only do I talk a kind of baby talk, with an appalling accent, but the things I actually say are often quite different from what I meant to say. This confuses the household [to] no end. I give orders to the staff and yes, yes, they say, and I feel fine, on top of things, in control. Then nothing happens" (26-27). After Page has to undergo surgery over the Christmas holidays, she is relieved to have as a companion the daughter of one of the servants. She comments that the young girl is "a perfect convalescence present for me. We sit together on the patio and draw, or take slow walks in the garden—two children, really, for my Portuguese is just about at her level" (108). Similarly, Page describes the challenge of trying to read a novel by Daphne du Maurier in Portuguese. While she manages to understand the text "with the help of a dictionary," it "bores me. That is the trouble: what interests me I can't read; what I can, doesn't" (55). To phrase it differently, one's lack of fluency in a language not only poses a major barrier to communication with others but also results in the truncation of one's intellectual universe.

Still, Page never gives the impression that she has any option but to attempt to function in the Portuguese language. She clearly does not share the view of the US wife of Rio de Janeiro's Episcopalian bishop, who advises Irwin "not to bother to learn Portuguese. There is no need" (26). Or that of a Canadian stenographer who tells Page that, when she arrived, she found Brazilians "awful . . . They were so ignorant they couldn't even speak English" (101; see also 67). Page does not explain if the Canadian stenographer knew any Portuguese when she landed in South America. However, one of the reasons she becomes so determined to learn Portuguese is that she discovers that Brazil's self-image could

preclude some Brazilians from addressing foreign dignitaries in their own language even when they spoke it fluently. She recounts “an immense dinner” (34) that was given for Irwin and her by an executive of the Canadian multinational Brazilian Traction, Light, and Power, later known as Brascan, which had extensive holdings throughout Brazil. “Despite the fact that the party was for us, and that the guests could all speak perfectly good English,” writes Page, “they spoke Portuguese at [the] table. One man did stop speaking Portuguese long enough to tell me, in English, how important it was for me to learn Portuguese. Of course it is. I’m learning as fast as I can” (34; see also 107). Needless to say, one of the things that Page learns during her discursive interactions in Brazil is that, whatever else it may be, a language is also a vehicle for nationalism.

In terms of her relation to the Portuguese language, Page’s most notable triumph occurred in May 1958, when she was invited to address the Brazilian Academy of Letters (Academia Brasileira de Letras)—along with the wives of two others ambassadors, a historian and a novelist. Page was troubled both by the fact that the three women would never have received the “honour” had it not been for the positions held by their husbands and that “no Brazilian woman writers had been so received” (148, 149; see also 67 and Djwa 170). Yet, even though she had been in Brazil for just over a year, she decided not only to give the speech but to do so in Portuguese, including “two small nature poems.” Her aim was to present the members of the Academy with a sketch of the places that she and Irwin had “visited in Brazil, as described by their poets” (149; see also Page, “Discurso”). The process of composition was somewhat unorthodox, involving the assistance of Irwin’s “editorial skills and a translator who was able to provide me with Portuguese words I could pronounce,” chronicling “my discovery of their Brazil.” The speech itself concluded with Page “addressing the academicians directly, with a quote from [the beloved Brazilian Romantic poet] Gonçalves Dias: ‘Meninos, eu vi,’” which she renders as “Little boys, I’ve seen it myself” (149). The line that Page cites, which comes from Dias’s 1851 Indianist narrative poem *I-Juca Pirama*, is well known in Brazilian literature and, as she had hoped, her “climax worked like a charm” (151). The three addresses reportedly were a complete success, attracting front-page coverage in the local media. Brazil’s president, Juscelino Kubitschek, “complained he hadn’t been invited” and Page “received flowers and phone calls and telegrams. It might have been my birthday” (151). In short, it was not a mean achievement.

Page made at least one other literary intervention in Portuguese, a translation of Emily Dickinson’s short poem “I never saw a Moor,” which she did for her “Portuguese professor” (179), presumably as a class exercise. Although the translation shows some flair,

it is not always correct. In fact, as her account of the writing of her speech to the Brazilian Academy of Letters suggests, Page never mastered Portuguese. Curiously, this did not prevent her from making “sweeping generalizations” about the purported link between the behaviour of Brazilians and the Portuguese language (Braz, “Missing” 49), something that she started to do almost the moment she arrived in Rio. The most problematic of these pronouncements is her linguistic explanation for the high levels of violence in Brazil. According to Page, “Portuguese is fascinating. In a country which, to us, seems to place small value on life, there is little difference between ‘to live’, *morar*, and ‘to die’, *morre*” (30). The problem with her claim is that “there is little phonetic resemblance between the Portuguese equivalents of to live and to die. *Morre* does mean to die; however, the equivalent of to live is not *morar* but *viver*. The word *morar* means simply to reside on some street” or avenue (Braz, “Missing” 49). In other words, Page’s theory for defining the “country is built on a precarious linguistic foundation, which inevitably leads a reader with some knowledge of Portuguese to question” her insights into Brazil and its people (49).

That being said, I must confess that I tend to be quite forgiving of Page’s misjudgments of Brazil—if not so of her politics. For one, Page came to appreciate her “Brazilian self,” and to perceive her sojourn in the land of the sun as a “beautiful, tropical, golden dream” (*Brazilian* 238). As she testifies in her subsequent *Mexican Journal*, “I cannot be too grateful for our term in sophisticated Brazil where we really learned an awful lot. I only just begin to realize how much we did learn” (39). In another text, she becomes almost mystical as she reflects on her “first foreign language” and the transformations that it engendered to her very being. “One is a toy at first,” she remarks, “a doll. Then a child. Gradually, as vocabulary increases, an adult again. But a different adult. Who am I, then, that language can so change me? What is personality, identity?” (“Questions” 36). More significant, throughout *Brazilian Journal* Page never camouflages the fact that she is a neophyte in Portuguese, someone who often “understand[s] only snatches” of what she hears or reads, even when it is a guidebook about a miracle in the rolling country between São Paulo and Rio, as her “Portuguese is not quite good enough to understand what the miracle was” (51). What I find much more disconcerting is that neither Page’s editors nor her Canadian critics, until recently (see Bailey (2011) and McGregor (2013)), questioned her claims about Brazil, no matter how feeble they happened to be, or consulted Brazilian scholars (Almeida (2001), Nenevé (2003), and Martins (2015)). It is as if, in Canada, one can say whatever one wishes about Brazil without running the risk of being challenged by anyone, giving credence to Lower’s thesis that, while the two countries may live on the same street, they remain largely invisible to each other.

The conviction that culturally Brazil continues to be terra incognita for most Canadians, even prominent scholars, is amply supported by Sandra Djwa's 2012 biography of Page, *Journey with No Maps*. Djwa is a much-honoured literary critic and cultural biographer. She is the author of several studies of Canadian literary figures, notably Roy Daniells and F.R. Scott, which have been the recipients of major prizes. Her life of Page is no exception, winning the 2013 Governor General's Award for non-fiction. Yet Djwa's chapter on Page's Brazilian experience is peppered with typographical errors, revealing an extraordinary lack of familiarity with Portuguese spelling. For instance, at the outset, Djwa informs us that the residence of the Canadian ambassador was then "fairly isolated, lying some distance to the west of the main part of Rio at the foot of two mountains known as Os Dios Irmãos, 'the twin brothers'" (162). Unluckily, for her, in Portuguese, the number two is not spelled *dios* but *dois*; also "Dois Irmãos" translates literally as "Two Brothers," not "Twin Brothers," which would be "Gêmeos." Likewise, one of Page's closest friends in Rio was a woman named Helena Borges, who also painted and whose "straightforward, blunt manner" Page found "strangely un-Brazilian" and whom she "liked . . . very much" (Page, *Brazilian* 64); Borges also "struggled so doggedly and obliquely to make a Catholic" out of Page but failed, likely not because of the Canadian's "godlessness" (238), but because she found Catholicism "very alien" (Page and Heenan 104). Since Borges was the wife of an industrialist, Page often addressed her as *Dona*, the Portuguese equivalent of Lady or Mrs. Djwa, however, Hispanicizes *Dona* and turns it into "Doña" (167 ff.). As well, Djwa transforms the name of a Brazilian charity that Borges gets Page to join from the "Pioneiras," or Women Pioneers, into "*Pionerias*" (167). In addition, when she relates that Page quotes a canonical Brazilian poet in her address to the Brazilian Academy of Letters, she renders Gonçalves Dias's first name as "Gonçlaves" (169).

Typically for a Canadian writing about Brazil, Djwa misspells Bahia. The state of Bahia, as Page explains, played a pivotal role in "Brazil's early colonial history. Slightly larger than France, it . . . extends five hundred miles inland from the coast" (*Brazilian* 127). Page was especially impressed by its capital city, Salvador, which she notes is "commonly called Bahía [sic] by Brazilians outside the state. It overlooks the Bahía de Todos os Santos (Bay of All Saints). With its upper and lower towns it reminded me of Quebec, a tropical Quebec. Founded in 1549, it is Brazil's oldest city, and its first capital" (127). Bahia, which is the centre of African culture in Brazil, is renowned for a variety of features, from its long sandy beaches, through Salvador's UNESCO-recognized colonial architecture, to its music and cuisine. Yet Djwa cannot even get the name of the state right, which she spells as "Bahai" (166, 173), confusing the state with a religion.

Perhaps the systematic misspelling of Brazilian places and names in Djwa's biography of Page is not as egregious as I am suggesting. It is possible that it is just a reflection of the apparent disappearance of copy-editing from Canadian publishing, including the academic variety. Yet I suspect that there is more to the matter than merely shoddy, or nonexistent, proofreading. At the very least, it illustrates a general ignorance of Brazil by educated Canadians, who do not deem it necessary to consult someone with a modicum of expertise to check their writings about a culture with which they are not familiar. Moreover, this lack of cultural and linguistic literacy is disconcerting for other reasons. First, Portuguese is not exactly a minor tongue, being "the world's sixth most widely-spoken language" (Fitz 440). No less important, Brazil is the second most populous country on the continent, which begs the question of why it is of such marginal interest to Canadians, beyond the fact it is located in South America.

The degree to which Canadians do not consider Brazil to be part of their geocultural world is underlined by Priscilla Uppal's 2013 memoir *Projection: Encounters with My Runaway Mother*. Uppal, who was born in Ottawa in 1974 and is currently a professor of English at Toronto's York University, is one of Canada's most prolific and acclaimed young writers. She is the author of some ten collections of poetry, two novels, and a volume of short stories—as well as the author of a scholarly study of the elegy in Canadian poetry and the editor of several anthologies of poems and essays. More germane in terms of the subject of this essay, in addition to her memoir, she has written a play, short stories, and numerous poems about Brazil.

The attention that Uppal has devoted to Brazil in her writings is not accidental but rather a reflection of her biography, specifically her traumatic relationship with her mother. Uppal was born to two recent arrivals in Canada, an immigrant from India named Avtar Uppal and Theresa Catharina de Góes Campos, the daughter of the military attaché to the Brazilian Embassy. Her father, Uppal writes in *Projection*, was "an up-and-comer, a tall-dark-and-handsome intelligent civil servant," who was "responsible for overseeing the building of infrastructure projects on eight Caribbean commonwealth islands" for the Canadian International Development Agency (3). Her mother, in turn, was a privileged young woman whose father was "a pilot in the Brazilian Air Force" before becoming a diplomat (33) and other relatives were composers and poets who have streets named after them in Rio (206). However, the family was turned upside down in 1977, when Uppal's father "swallowed contaminated water during a sailboat accident in Antigua" and was rendered "a quadriplegic" (3-4). Her mother was unable to accept the reversal of her fortunes and late in 1982, when Uppal was eight and her brother Jit was nine, she abandoned her family and returned to her native Brazil (5).

Theresa Campos would vanish from her daughter's life for nearly two decades. In September 2002, while searching the Internet for reviews of her first novel, *The Divine Economy of Salvation*, Uppal came across a website that included information about her and her brother. She is stumped at first, since the writing is "all in Portuguese" (13). But, thanks to the translation function, she discerns that the site belongs to her "runaway mother, a person I hadn't seen or heard from and whose name I hadn't spoken aloud in twenty years" (12). Before long, she also learns that her mother has cancer. After she recovers from the shock, she contacts Campos by telephone and, fearing that she "might not get the chance" to meet her again (14), decides to travel to Brazil, a country about which she knew almost nothing. These turn out to be "ten turbulent days" ("Brazil" 79) that will take her first to São Paulo, where her mother now works as a journalist and film critic, and then to Brasília to meet the rest of the Campos clan.

The encounter between Uppal and her mother is an unmitigated disaster, although Uppal does connect with other members of the family, particularly her "elegant and . . . grace[ful]" grandmother. In fact, by the end of her visit, Uppal is convinced that she has displaced her mother, who now plays "second fiddle" to her, among her Brazilian kin (*Projection* 195). Part of the reason that daughter and mother are not able to make a connection is that they come to perceive each other as the embodiment of their respective countries. For Uppal, Campos is not just "that woman who left her husband and two children" but who did so "for Brazil" (86), which becomes the antithesis of Canada. After her mother belligerently claims that "*Canada is no better a country than Brazil*" and that "[t]here is no democracy in Canada" (155; italics in the text), Uppal goes as far as to produce a list of "*Ten Things*" she loves about the Great White North (156; italics in the text). Among them are "Pierre Elliott Trudeau," a predilection she shares with her father, and her "Canadian passport," which she stresses "should *not* need a visa to visit Brazil" (157). Significantly, Uppal continues to resent the fact that she is required to get a visa to travel to Brazil, even though she has already informed the reader that Brazil imposed that condition only after "Canada put a restriction on Brazilians travelling to Canada. Tit for tat thing" (21). That is, she finds it unacceptable when Canadians are treated the same way they treat Brazilians.

There are other problematic aspects to Uppal's unrelenting privileging of Canada over Brazil, especially in light of her hyper Canadian nationalism. Uppal is a fervent patriot, who considers Canada Day the holiest of holidays, the only day of the year that, even as a teenager, she "didn't like to work." Indeed, she confesses that she has always "felt more Canadian than part of a family" (194). Curiously, she notes that no one in Brazil "thinks I'm anything but Brazilian when they set eyes upon me, until I speak. With my exotic mixed

heritage, my abundant curly black hair and olive complexion, high Indian cheekbones, and my penchant for vintage clothing and party hats, I am not used to this, and find it liberating to blend in" (69). The latter part of the statement is striking, since it suggests that the same does not happen at home, that she does not quite "blend in," which would call into question the openness of the Canada that she so passionately champions throughout *Projection*.

In any case, Uppal is correct when she states that her lack of fluency in Portuguese is at the heart of her difference. "Language," she remarks, "is the irrefutable indication to all outsiders that even if my mother introduces herself as such, we must not have had much contact if I know only a handful of Portuguese words" (69); as the central character in her play *6 Essential Questions* states, "I am sorry. *No fala [Não falo] Portuguese*" (5). However, in her case, language is not just a family marker; it is also a national one. It is evidence that she does not fully belong to the Brazilian community, as her usage of Portuguese highlights. Uppal is clearly ambivalent about both Brazil and Brazilians, not least their national language. In a 2006 poem entitled "I'm Afraid of Brazilians or Visiting the Ancestral Homeland Is Not the Great Ethnic Experience Promised by Other Memoirs," which can be seen as a companion text to *Projection*, she writes that she is not only "afraid of Brazilians" but "of everything Brazilian I meet," including the country's "currency" and its "language" (*Ontological* 58). Despite this antagonism toward Portuguese, and the fact she has "almost zero knowledge" of the language (*Projection* 65), Uppal must be praised for buying collections of Brazilian poetry upon arriving in São Paulo and for trying to translate them. She does this with the help of two dictionaries and, after over "two hours of intense concentration," she manages to produce "fifteen lines" (65), thus achieving one of the aims of her trip, which is to acquire "Brazilian poetry books and attempt crude translations" (120). Yet when she shows the results to her mother, the latter sounds equivocal as to the value of the exercise. As she responds, "*There is so little appreciation for translation . . . I got tired of the ingratitude. Better to write your own work. You have only so many years on earth*" (66-67; italics in the text). While it is unclear whether Campos is lamenting the lowly socioeconomic status of translation—or, once again, failing to support her daughter—it is possible that she does not think too highly of Uppal's grasp of Brazilian parlance.

Judging by Uppal's handling of Portuguese in *Projection*, there are certainly grounds for being skeptical about her appreciation of either the language or the culture for which it is a vehicle. Since Uppal is fluent in French, one might think that it would make it easier for her to understand another Romance language. But this does not appear to be the case, as there are many semantic and grammatical mistakes in her text. One of her most flagrant errors is the misspelling of the Portuguese word for God, *Deus*, turning the title of the

Brazilian film *Deus é brasileiro*, or *God Is Brazilian*, into “Dues É Brasileiro” (no italics in the text). Moreover, she does it twice in two rather conspicuous places, the table of contents and the title of a chapter (n. pag, 109). Regarding religious terms, she also mistranslates Happy Easter, rendering *Feliz Páscoa* as “*Felice Pasqua*,” and again she does it both in the table of contents and the title of a chapter (n. pag, 187). Similarly, she mistranslates the Portuguese equivalent of title. Uppal informs us that while she is “an abstraction and expressionism fan,” her mother is a romanticist and impressionist. Campos also apparently “disapproves of artworks lacking titles. *Sem Titleo*,” or *Untitled* (88), which in Portuguese is spelled *Sem título*.

One of Uppal’s oddest constructions involves a combination of misspelling and mixing genders. She transforms the expression *boa noite*, or good night, into “*bon [bom] noite*” (106). This is a peculiar concoction, since *bom* is masculine and *noite* is feminine, creating the impression that one word is at war with the other. Uppal also writes that she is pleasantly surprised to learn that São Paulo has a street named after her homeland, which she renders as “rue Canada” (121), as opposed to “rua Canadá.” Equally unlikely are the spellings of the names of some of the people that she is to meet during her visit to Brasília, which Campos purportedly writes for her on postcards, along “with indicators of family or social ties as they relate, not to me, of course, but to my mother” (173). One of those individuals is “*Succoro [Socorro?]*,” who is not just a housekeeper but also a “*querida [querida] amiga*,” or dear friend (173). Even more improbable is the name of one of her mother’s aunts, “*Maria des Gracas*” (174). The most common spelling of the name is Maria da Graça, which literally means Mary of Grace. Instead, Uppal calls her Mary Disgraces. Finally, she misspells the name of the president of Brazil. The head of state at the time Uppal first visited Brazil was a former factory worker and labour leader named Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, commonly known as Lula, as she points out early in her memoir (33). But toward the end of the text, she changes his name to “Lulu,” whom she describes as “a man of the people” (214). Needless to say, his popularity must not extend to Canada, considering the fact that neither the author nor anyone at the press that published her book noticed the misspelling.

Although in this essay I have been rather critical of how Canadians who write about Brazil often reveal their lack of knowledge of the country and its culture, usually through their cavalier treatment of the Portuguese language, I do not wish to imply that Brazilians show more sensitivity toward Canada. To begin with, Brazilian novelists, poets, and playwrights have written even less about Canada than their Canadian counterparts have about their country. Furthermore, when they do, they often seem mystified by the

country’s cultural and political specificity, notably its constitutional monarchism and its historical identification with Europe. This is very much the case of what is considered the earliest Brazilian literary work about Canada. In 1886, only one year after Louis Riel had been hanged for treason by the Canadian state, the poet and polemicist Mathias Carvalho wrote a narrative poem about the Métis leader entitled *Poemas americanos I: Riel*. Born in Bahia in 1851, Carvalho gained prominence in Rio’s journalistic and literary circles in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He was especially associated with abolitionist and republican causes, and has been described as both a “valiant proponent of republican ideas” and a “violent, revolutionary, and intransigent republican” (M. 132; Severo 7—my translation). Regardless of which assessment one favours, there is little doubt that his republicanism profoundly affected the way he perceived Riel as well as Canada.

*Poemas americanos* was supposed to be the first of a series of poems about political liberators in the Americas (M. 132) but, for unknown reasons, it was the only volume that Carvalho produced. The Brazilian Riel is definitely an emancipator, someone who is determined to free his people politically and mentally. As the poet opens a section called “*Tempestades Luminosas*” (“Luminous Storms”):

RIEL tinha visões! no cerebro aquecido  
Sentia o galopar do esplendido arruido  
Dos novos ideaes da civilisação;  
E via o Privilegio estrebuchante e morto,  
Sobre o corpo immoral d’esse espantoso aborto  
O grande festival dos filhos da Rasão. (Carvalho/Morisset 38)

RIEL had visions! In his fervent brain  
He felt the galloping of the splendid tumult  
Of civilization’s new ideals;  
And saw Privilege stumbling and dead,  
Over the immoral body of that hideous abortion  
The great festival of the children of Reason. (My translation)

Puzzlingly, Carvalho’s Riel is not engaged in a political and military struggle against Canada, but on behalf of Canada. He is striving to free Canada from a “terrible prison,” which is controlled by “the greatest thieves in Europe,” the British (26, 28; my translation). No less astonishing, in a poem about the self-declared Prophet of the New World, there

is not a single reference to his people, the Métis. In short, although Carvalho is overtly sympathetic to Canada, one cannot help but notice that there is not much of Canada in what he terms the continent's "sacred, boreal eminence" (24; my translation). Or perhaps his poem unwittingly illustrates that when Carvalho describes the Canadian as the "Man of the North about whom nobody gave a thought" (48; my translation), this includes the poet himself (see Braz, "Promised Land").

Ironically, the contemporary dissemination of Carvalho's poem on Riel also highlights how the Portuguese language remains a challenge in Canada-Brazil relations. Since the turn of the century, *Poemas americanos* has been published in bilingual editions in both French and English. In 1997, the Québec geographer Jean Morisset edited a Portuguese-French edition of the poem under the title *Louis Riel, poèmes américains*. Then in 2011, the Canadian born and educated religion scholar Jennifer Reid included a Portuguese-English version of Carvalho's poem in her book *Religion, Writing, and Colonial Resistance* (Carvalho/Reid 27-56). However, the Portuguese text used in both volumes is heavily bowdlerized, never more so than in the preface. For example, Carvalho uses such unidiomatic constructions as "Inglaterra" [Inglaterra], "condemnal-a" [condená-la], "offereceo" [ofereceu], and "elle" [ele] (Carvalho/Morisset 16). The nature (and frequency) of the orthographic errors suggests that Carvalho's poem was not transcribed by someone who is intimately familiar with the Portuguese language. This lack of fluency is also evident in Morisset's translation, where a term as basic as Canada, "O Canadá," is rendered not as "Le Canada," but as "Ô Canada" (Carvalho/Morisset 26, 27). Strangely, over a decade later, Reid decided to reproduce Morisset's version of *Poemas americanos*, even though she was aware that "there are unmistakable errors . . . in respect to grammar and syntax, as well as spelling" (J. Reid 15). While she offers the rationale that no copy of the original has yet been located, she never explains the urgency in disseminating such a faulty text, which is unlikely to add to Carvalho's reputation as a poet.

Of course, the primary objective of this essay is not to try to refute the thesis that a "translation is a linguistic 'zone of contact' between the foreign and translating cultures" (Venuti, "Translation" 477), which, rather than "reproducing the source text," often inscribes "an interpretation that reflects what is intelligible and interesting to receptors" (Venuti, "World Literature" 180). Likewise, I have no desire to discourage travel writing merely because the foreign author's experience is inevitably influenced by his or her culture, as one's "expectations make the landscape lie" (Sagaris 6; emphasis in the text). In the case of Canadian representations of Brazil, one just has to consider the work of either Edward Lacey or Jan Conn to discern how writers can make links between different cultures. Lacey,

who can be seen as a Canadian anti-P.K. Page, not only depicts an underprivileged Brazil with which even most Brazilians are not familiar but, in his translation of a book like Adolfo Caminha's novel *Bom-Crioulo*, he gains new readers for the 1895 classic about race and homosexuality in the Brazilian Navy (Bezerra 95; see also Caminha). The poet-geneticist Conn, in turn, presents a world where it is perfectly ordinary for a Canadian visitor to the Amazon to listen to both "Chico Buarque and English songs" (73). Even Page, despite her elitism, provides critical insights into Brazilian society, unexpectedly concerning race. When she remarks that she has "never met a Negro [guest] at a party" (*Brazilian* 76) or that the same Brazilians who boast that they "have no colour prejudice," then proceeded to tell her that "they have found the way to solve the colour problem: intermarriage will produce a white race" (140), she obviously reveals much about the true race dynamics in a country where, in 2016, under Michel Temer's presidency, both the federal cabinet and the Supreme Court were "all white" (Nolen).

Rather, what this essay has tried to achieve is to promote openness to difference, which often requires a willingness to engage with other languages. I suppose that what I am trying to counter is the attitude expressed in the passage that serves as the epigraph to this essay, where Andrew Pyper has one of his characters state in his novel *The Trade Mission*: "This is in Brazil, but it could be anywhere" (6). If the statement were true, it would eliminate the necessity of travelling to distant places—since, presumably, one would have the same experience at home. But the assertion is clearly fallacious, as Pyper demonstrates both in the novel and in the notebook that he wrote about his research in Brazil. For instance, one of his complaints about São Paulo is that, "It can rain suddenly here! Heading to dinner around the corner from the hotel, then WHAM!, the heaviest rainfall I've ever been caught in" ("Brazilian" 104). Once he reaches Manaus, it is the "heat. Like I've never fucking been slapped before. One step out of the lobby of the [Hotel] Ana Cassia and I thought I was a goner" (105). The Amazon, foreseeably, also has all sorts of unusual—definitely un-Canadian—creatures. As one of his characters remarks, "There are snakes here that can stop your heart with a single bite or swallow children whole. Vicious schools of piranha. And still malaria, yellow fever and other airborne concerns. Not to mention a million ways of getting lost. Anything can still happen in places like this" (*Trade* 62). In other words, whatever the Brazil portrayed by Pyper may be, it is not like everywhere else. It is most clearly not like home. One of his protestations about São Paulo is actually that it is too fast-paced. As he asks rhetorically, "Where is everyone going? Why do they need to get there so quickly?" ("Brazilian" 103). That, indeed, is an unusual complaint from a northerner about the tropics—that life moves too quickly there.

Needless to say, Canadians are perfectly entitled not to like Brazil, or Brazilians. This is particularly true of someone like Priscila Uppal, who has legitimate grievances against a country that served as a haven to her truant mother. Still, when Canadian writers malign Brazil, it is not always evident if they are doing it deliberately or because of cultural illiteracy, most conspicuously their lack of knowledge of Portuguese. The solution, I propose, would be to emulate the diplomatic service. In his memoir, the Canadian diplomat Escott Reid relates that the Governor General in the 1940s, the Earl of Athlone, had a tendency to confuse visiting heads of state by addressing, say, the president of Colombia as “the president of the republic of Venezuela” (153). In order to avoid such faux pas, the diplomatic corps developed a system to remind the Governor General of the country whose dignitaries were being fêted by serving its national dishes. Thus, if the visitor “were the president of Argentina, the soup would be potage Argentine” (153). Perhaps Canadian authors who write about other countries, notably Brazil, need to adopt a similar strategy, something that would remind them that they are dealing with a culture with which they may not be familiar. One of its merits is that it might prevent such infelicities as referring to Bahian cuisine as Bahai cuisine. Conveniently, there seems to be a direct correlation between savouring great meals, especially when well lubricated, and language proficiency. Page describes a luncheon at an industrialist’s country estate, “which was chockful of people, whisky, and the Portuguese language. Delicious food. Champagne. My Portuguese improved with each course” (*Brazilian* 155). I shall say no more.

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